

Information on Lyme Disease



What is Lyme disease?

Lyme disease was first recognized in the United States in 1975. It is an infection caused by *Borrelia burgdorferi*, a corkscrew-shaped spirochete (a type of bacterium).

How is Lyme disease spread?

Lyme disease can be spread by the bite of certain ticks of the genus *Ixodes* that are infected with *Borrelia burgdorferi* bacteria. *Ixodes* ticks are much smaller than common dog and cattle ticks. Ticks can attach to any part of the human body, but often attach to the more hidden and hairy areas such as the groin, armpits, and scalp. Research in the eastern United States indicates that infected ticks most often spread the disease during the "nymph" stage because they are smaller and more likely to feed longer without detection.

In the northeastern and north-central United States, Lyme disease is usually transmitted by *Ixodes scapularis* (formerly "*I. Dammini*"), the "deer or bear tick." On the Pacific Coast, the bacteria are transmitted to humans by *Ixodes pacificus*, the "western black-legged tick," and in the southeastern states possibly by the "black-legged tick."

Is there Lyme disease in Idaho?

Since 1990, *on average* fewer than 3 cases of Lyme disease have been reported each year in Idaho and less than 1 case a year was reported in Health District 4 (Ada, Boise, Elmore and Valley counties). Most of those infections were probably acquired in states which have higher incidences of Lyme disease.

What are the symptoms of Lyme disease?

The early stage of Lyme disease is usually marked by one or more of the following symptoms and signs: fatigue, chills and fever, headache, muscle and joint pain, swollen lymph nodes, and a characteristic skin rash, called erythema migrans. Symptoms of Lyme disease which can appear weeks to months later may include:

- pain and swelling in one or more of the large joints, especially the knees
- nervous system abnormalities like numbness, pain, Bell's Palsy (paralysis of the facial muscles, usually on one side), and meningitis (fever, stiff neck, and severe headache)
- Less frequently, irregularities of the heart's rhythm occur.

When do symptoms appear?

Symptoms can appear within a few days to several weeks after infection. One of the first symptoms to appear is erythema migrans, a red circular patch at the site of the bite. The patch expands, often to a large size, and the center may clear, resulting in a "bull's-eye" appearance. In some persons the rash never forms; in some, the first and only sign of Lyme disease is arthritis, and in others, nervous system problems are the only evidence of Lyme disease.

Is there a vaccine for Lyme disease?

As of 2004 there is no commercial vaccine available. **Still the best thing a person can do to prevent Lyme disease is avoid coming into contact with ticks.**

What is the treatment for Lyme disease?

A physician can prescribe antibiotics to treat Lyme infection. Usually, patients treated in the early stages of Lyme disease recover rapidly and completely. Most patients in the later stages of Lyme disease also respond to antibiotic treatment. Permanent damage to the joints and nervous system can result with late, chronic Lyme disease which was not treated or in which treatment was inadequate.

Removing ticks.

After being outdoors, remove clothing and wash and dry it at a high temperature; inspect your body carefully and remove attached ticks with tweezers, grasping the tick as close to the skin surface as possible and pulling straight back with a slow steady force; avoid crushing the tick's body.

How to prevent Lyme disease.

- Avoid tick-infested areas, especially in the spring and summer months.
- Wear light-colored clothing so ticks can be seen more easily.
- Wear long-sleeved shirts. Tuck pant legs into socks or boots and shirt into pants. Tape the area where pants and socks meet so that ticks cannot crawl under clothing.
- Spray insect repellent containing DEET on clothes and on exposed skin other than the face.
- Wear a hat for added protection.
- Walk in the center of trails to avoid overhanging grass and brush.

Resource for Additional Information

Detailed information on Lyme Disease is available from the Division of Vector-Borne Infectious Diseases at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/lyme>.

If you have questions, please call your doctor or local health department.

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